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ABSTRACT

An underachieving middle school in the urban South, currently in the second of a 5-year curriculum development project, is the subject of analysis by the participant curriculum consultant. The names of the school and all participants have been changed to preserve anonymity. Field notes, school documents, formal interview notes, questionnaires, and demographic and test data are described to document the failure of the change process. Failure of the project is attributed to (1) absence of leadership by the principal and the related failure to actively involve classroom teachers; (2) lack of communication between teachers and change agents as to exactly what classroom change was expected and the failure to help teachers effect such change; and (3) ongoing functioning of the school taking precedence over curriculum change activities. (MLF)

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"A Piece of the Dirt"[1]:

Curriculum Change at Boynton Middle School, August, 1983-February, 1984[2]

Jean A. King

Tulane University

April, 1984

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[1]Teacher: "Ask for the stars and the moon, then you may get a piece of the dirt" (Field Notes, 9/15/83).

[2]A paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April, 1984. The names of the school and all participants in the school effectiveness project have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

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1. Introduction

This paper is the most recent progress report in an ongoing study of the curriculum change process. The Boynton School Improvement Project, sponsored by an Outside Advocacy Group (OAG) at an underachieving middle school in the urban South, is currently in the second of five years, and three years remain before anyone passes final judgment on the success or failure of the project.

In describing the project about a year ago, I confidently wrote, "If change is to occur at all in a school, it should certainly occur in this school during the coming year" (King, 1983b). I believed it, too. During the preceding school year, weekly meetings of selected faculty, project staff, and invited consultants had planned activities to improve the functioning of Boynton Middle School. The advocacy group that had initiated the project secured funding to support two on-site staff, and both top management and the teachers' union voiced strong support. I had further reason for my confidence--the two women who would manage the curriculum development activities: one a school board employee, one an employee of the OAG; one black, one white; both experienced in the classroom, enthusiastic, knowledgeable; both committed full-time to helping Boynton's teachers turn their school around, classroom by classroom.

Other factors added to my optimism. The entire school system was one year into a thorough K-12 curriculum revision in all subject areas; the central office had announced plans to concentrate on improving instruction in basic skills; Boynton's principal had recently returned from a three-week school improvement course at a respected Southern university; and two-thirds of the teachers at Boynton were involved in a state-sponsored professional improvement program. Naively, I assumed that the prerequisites for change were in place and that my study of the process of classroom curriculum change at Boynton would generate more data than I could easily analyze. From that perspective I wrote the proposal for this paper last July.

But I was wrong. Despite all the reasons for expecting significant change, only in a limited sense was there curriculum change in Boynton's classrooms this year. When I sat down in late September to write up the project data for the planning year (May, 1982 through July, 1983), my suspicions were aroused. An earlier paper documents in painful detail the work of the Boynton Curriculum Subcommittee during the 1982-1983 school year (King, 1983a), providing extensive documentation for the failure of a "rational," Mauritz Johnsonian approach to curriculum development at Boynton.

To summarize briefly, a working group led almost entirely by two OAG staff had drafted a proposal in June, 1983, for submission to the school board. By merely listing

the proposed course offerings for the 1983-1984 school year (e.g., adding courses in French, computer literacy, and music), the curriculum portion of the proposal incorporated certain of the Subcommittee's ideas, but in no way captured the full extent of the group's deliberations. The proposal required no explicit changes of individual classroom teachers, and, when asked on a questionnaire in August how the project would affect their classroom for the coming year, over half the teachers left a blank, put a question mark, or wrote that it would have no effect (questionnaire results, 8/83). Nevertheless, for the reasons cited above, I and my colleagues at Boynton anticipated the new year with hope and high expectations.

A comment on my role in the project is in order. During 1982-1983 I attended School Committee and Curriculum Subcommittee meetings as both an observer and informal consultant. In the fall, for reasons to be discussed later, the Curriculum Subcommittee was not reactivated, and, due to a scheduling conflict, I was unable to continue attending School Committee meetings. I opted instead to observe classroom instruction, to attend meetings when I could, and to continue serving as a participant curriculum consultant. In this final role I worked with Jeanne Jackson and Cynthia McDuff, the people responsible for curriculum change at Boynton. Their continued support and cooperation have enriched the data to be discussed here, and I am in their debt.

Unlike the other papers in this session on the topic of classroom decision making, my paper will instead describe what did (and did not) happen at Boynton Middle School this year, then discuss the factors that can inhibit the curriculum change process in a school effectiveness project. Specifically, the discussion will be divided into four parts: a description of the research setting; a conceptual and methodological summary; a description of curriculum change activities at Boynton thus far in the 1983-1984 school year; and a discussion of factors affecting the school-level (and ultimately the classroom-level) process of curriculum change.

2. The Research Setting

Educational writing of late has increasingly emphasized the importance of describing the context of individual schools (e.g., Goodlad, 1983; Carew & Lightfoot, 1979) in order that the process of education and of educational change be fully understood. Conditions at Boynton are so consistently discouraging that the uninitiated may well doubt the accuracy of the description. I sometimes wonder if I would believe that all these characteristics could be found in one school if I read about it in a fictional piece.

And yet I myself am guilty of assuming that my audience somehow intuits how it feels to work in an underachieving urban middle school in the South, despite the fact that after two years I continue to be amazed by what is accepted as normal operating procedure there. Allow me, then, to

describe the characteristics of Boynton Middle School that (ignoring the reasons for my optimism given above) make it as unlikely a site for change as could be imagined. Indeed, the fact that so much change was needed was one of the primary reasons the school was selected in 1982 as the site of the OAG project.

Before integration, Boynton Senior High School was the pride of a well-established neighborhood that was first settled in the early 1700's. The building dominates the surrounding area, and many of its graduates during the '40s and '50s are today's community leaders. The bell in its clocktower once symbolized to residents their integral involvement in and support of public education in the city. But in the years since the school system was integrated, Boynton has lost the public support it once enjoyed. Now Boynton is a middle school serving a 95% black student population, grades 7 and 8; the paint on the once impressive facade is faded and peeling; the bell and clock in its massive belltower no longer function; and by every objective measure the school is failing the students it serves.

Consider numerical data on the following topics: enrollment, attendance, and test scores. Boynton's enrollment has fallen steadily from 908 students in 1974 to 411 in 1982-1983 and 407 in the current schoolyear. Though it is illegal to do so, many students in Boynton's attendance district simply fail to appear in August, choosing instead to attend a nearby junior high school that

is reputed to be "better." Boynton is known as a "project" school because many of its students live at a nearby city housing project. While Boynton's attendance data are not unusual, they are yet another indicator of the school's status.[1] On the average, from seven to eleven per cent of enrolled students have been absent daily in the first two quarters of this year.

The results of both state and system standardized tests provide additional evidence of Boynton's difficulties. Boynton's scores on the 1983 state assessment minimum competency test (administered to all seventh graders) have appeared in the newspaper repeatedly; the school was the lowest in the entire state on both reading and mathematics subtests, and only one school kept it from being lowest on the writing subtest. Each of Boynton's subtest scores (reading, 60.80; writing, 63.71; mathematics, 46.08) is roughly ten points below the system average and twenty points below the state average. (Seventy is considered a passing score.) The results of systemwide standardized achievement test are also indicators of ineffectiveness. Last year's results, based on large city norms, are as follows:

Seventh grade reading- 38%

Seventh grade math- 36%

Eighth grade reading- 31%

Eighth grade math- 38%

Boynton's average percentiles for the last five years, again

based on large city norms, are as follows:

Seventh grade reading- 42%

Seventh grade math- 38%

Eighth grade reading- 32%

Eighth grade math- 38%

But these numbers are not the only indicators of Boynton's distress. Equally discouraging are the records on parental involvement, school climate, and discipline at Boynton. As is always the case, some parents at Boynton care a great deal about what is happening with their children's education and work hard to make it better. But with a student population of around 400, only ten to twenty parents are actively involved on an ongoing basis. Although the principal sponsors parent association meetings each semester, a typical attendance in past years of three to fifteen individuals suggests the relative success of these efforts.[2]

Boynton's school climate is characterized by a lack of cooperation and a sense of hopelessness. A formal survey conducted last spring (Profile of a School, Likert & Likert, 1977) found little cohesion at Boynton (survey results, 5/83). Teachers noted little "team spirit" in the school, feeling that it was more "every man for himself." My observations provide additional evidence of this atmosphere, despite smiles and friendly hellos in the hall. As Jeanne Jackson put it, "The atmosphere is just not conducive to getting you to buckle down and do something. [It's a

question of] attitude, really" (FN, 3/14/84). Cynthia McDuff confirms that "what really happens when you're Boyntonized is you say, 'Nothing matters'" (FN, 3/21/84). In this setting, when something of a pressing nature comes up, be it annoyance over noise in the halls, mandated attendance at a workshop, or a school vacation, it becomes easy to put off until tomorrow what you could do today. It is the norm of the school, and many teachers seem to have given up on their students.

Related to school climate is discipline, a subject heatedly debated during the two years of my involvement at the school. Everyone will concede that conditions have improved in the past ten years. At one point Boynton had a reputation for knife fights in the halls, and students feared for their safety; this is no longer the case (although the police have been called to the school at least once both last year and this year, most recently for the knifing of an eighth grade boy by a 21-year-old special education student who had been expelled).

If safety is no longer a central issue, creating an environment conducive to learning is. As one person put it, Boynton continues to be a "loose ship," even after months of work and numerous change activities--an inspirational one-day workshop with a national discipline consultant this fall, the implementation of a new discipline code, and the institution of afterschool detention and an intervention room for students who need to "cool off." Despite these

measures, some students continue to skip school, to cut classes, and to wander the halls during class periods with little fear of the consequences. Detention, for example, is cancelled every day it rains so students won't have to miss their buses and risk getting wet on their way home.

Because of this, some teachers just shake their heads, close their doors, and worry about classroom management in their own rooms. (The yardstick is an unofficial but accepted form of discipline for a small number of teachers at Boynton). Other teachers openly, loudly, and repeatedly berate the administration at faculty meetings (e.g., FN, 3/20/84).

But it would be unfair to create the impression that Boynton is a blackboard jungle. Quite the contrary. Even though the school rates poorly on all the common indicators of effectiveness, Boynton looks and acts like a school. Bells chime, and students flood the hallways (leaving rooms via the appropriate exit doors). For the most part, students line up outside classrooms in queues that would rival the British for orderliness, waiting for their teacher to allow them entry (via the entrance doors). Another bell chimes and they are allowed go in. Most come prepared; they bring or borrow pencils, papers, and textbooks. They sit quietly during class. They are given zeroes when they don't have their homework. They take tests. They carry passes to the bathroom.

Boynton has a football team (first in its division this

year), a basketball team (also first in its division), cheerleaders, the annual Valentine Hop, the Graduation Cotillion, faculty gong shows, cultural assemblies, a steady stream of complaints about the cafeteria food, candy bar sales for student groups, grafetti in the bathrooms, an occasional student pregnancy. Even if the halls are noisy and students do skip class, in this respect Boynton is not unique. On the surface it works like a school is supposed to. But as the evidence cited above suggests, something internal to the functioning of Boynton is very wrong, and that is what the OAG Boynton School Improvement Project set out to correct.

Why am I spending so much time describing Boynton? There is good reason. Unless you understand and visualize the environment in which the OAG change effort is taking place, you may be inclined to think that the setting itself is conducive to change. After all, the administration and faculty had to compete to become the project school, they have been committed to the change process for two years now, teachers are nominally involved on an ongoing basis in planning and monitoring the organizational, curricular, and instructional changes made, OAG staff are on-site and actively supporting the change effort, the Hawthorne effect may add that special touch of magic--the litany of positive factors is long. But while this list sounds convincing on paper, in the day-to-day reality of the change process (see Section 4), these things have meant little, and that is the

real subject of this paper.

Three additional introductory descriptions are needed: Boynton's faculty, principal, and initial involvement in the OAG project. Just as an understanding of the setting of the change process is important, so too is a sense of the characters and the "inciting event." Boynton began the 1983-1984 schoolyear with a faculty of 28 (four more than the system formula as a result of the OAG's influence): 19 "regular" teachers; six special education teachers; two Chapter I teachers (one math, one reading); and one guidance counsellor. Because of the high number of special education students in the building, two more staff members were added during the course of the year--the intervention room counsellor in December and an additional "regular" teacher in January.[3] The data below, provided by the teachers in August, 1983 suggest that this is a stable faculty of career teachers, most of whom have lived in the area (or at least the state) for much of their lives and many of whom seem committed to a longterm involvement at Boynton; white teachers and new blood are relatively rare commodities at the school.

1. Of the 28 faculty who began the year, only two (7%) are white; only eight (29%) are males.

2. Twenty-three of the faculty (82%) earned their undergraduate degrees at in-state, primarily black institutions.

3. Eighteen of Boynton's teachers (64% or almost two-thirds of the total faculty) have been teaching for more than eight years; only one teacher graduated from college in the past three years.

4. Only six (21%) currently hold masters degrees, but 16 (57%) have done graduate work and 19 (68%) are taking part in the State's professional improvement program for guaranteed salary increases.

5. Twenty-one teachers (75%) have taught at Boynton for five years or more (although no one has been there for more than 15 years); sixteen (57%) have been there for at least eight years.

6. No teacher who <u>first</u> taught at Boynton in the years 1979 to 1982 is teaching there this year, suggesting the stability of this faculty.

7. Boynton employs two husband/wife teams (social studies/English; art/special education).

As a regular observer of the faculty, I must add that despite a sincere and common commitment to the students, the group does not enjoy an esprit de corps. Cliques and factions divide the faculty, and they compete for presumed favors from the administration. While such divisions can be found in any faculty, what separates Boynton from other schools is the presence of an interteacher hostility. Teachers have on occasion blamed other teachers for immature pranks (e.g., notes in one faculty member's mailbox accusing her of an affair with another staff member), and unfounded and sometimes cruel rumors that are known to the students regularly fly classroom to classroom. Oftentimes little is accomplished at faculty meetings beyond an airing of personal grudges.

And what of Boynton's principal? Common sense and research assign him a primary role in any successful change effort, so the person of Tommy Thompson is central to the OAG project. Thompson, a light-skinned black man in his late 40's, is a former industrial arts teacher (who this

year is voluntarily and with joy teaching one class) and an acknowledged "gentleman," a "beautiful person." He has been principal of Boynton for 11 years, and it is obvious that he enjoys his work.

Always dressed in a suit, white shirt, and tie, Mr. Thompson will leave the school for meetings only when ordered to by his superiors; he often stays in his office until 6:00 and frequently comes in on Saturdays. Because Christianity is vital to the conduct of his life (he has taken courses at a local seminary and conducts faculty meetings like religious revivals), he continually stresses the importance of getting along together and making people feel at ease. Thompson is the kind of person who remembers your children's names and sincerely asks after them.

As an educational leader, however, he delivers a mixed message. He is quick to tell faculty and students alike that he didn't do well in school, and that, if it hadn't been for two teachers who showed an interest in him, he might never have gone on to college. What is important to Tommy Thompson, therefore, is not that Boynton's students become high achievers, but that they feel good about themselves. When questionned why 100 students were given permission to go on an all-day field trip to a bowling alley, Mr. Thompson explained that since many of the students would eventually end up on welfare or hanging around in bars, it was important that they have at least one worthwhile activity to occupy their free time (FN, 2/21/84).

For Mr. Thompson, corflict and confrontation are to be avoided at all costs. In tense, argumentative situations, he typically folds his arms and becomes nervous and silent until he can turn the conversation to a personal anecdote that changes the subject. The results of a school climate survey (April, 1983) indicated that while most teachers give him high marks as an "Educator," they rate him a poor administrator. Many of the faculty would like either to see him moved to another school, fired, or somehow forced to follow through on the many changes they see as necessary to turning Boynton around.

In light of such liabilities, it is difficult to expect that Boynton Middle School will make needed changes and better its students' lives. But that is where the activities of the Outside Advocacy Group, the final introductory description, come in. When I first heard of the OAG's activities, I assumed that it was an organization with considerable staff and resources. Only later did I learn that it is essentially a one person show, the lifework of a quiet, twinkling eyed, and inspirational woman named Millicent Brown. Her purpose in beginning the School Improvement Project is detailed in the original proposal to the school board:

> To develop a model for effective urban lower secondary schools and to develop a public school constituency within the project site community (by making the school work for its clients) and throughout the [area] (by demonstrating that even those schools "at risk" can be effective) (OAG Proposal, 1982, p.1).

Brown's intentions differed from those of many involved in

school improvement programs. The OAG project came with no predetermined set of activities, no prepackaged solutions, but rather an interest in effecting the change process, i.e., in helping a school learn to help itself, the "bootstrap approach" to school change. While by the fall of 1982 Brown and her staff had decided upon a measurable outcome--improved academic achievement as measured by standardized achievement tests--the means to that end were to be determined by the faculty, students, and parents of the site school. This independence and presumed control may have been more than the Boynton community could handle; in the opinion of one OAG staff person, "My feeling has always been that they expected a set OAG plan, never having had the experience of real involvement" (FN, 3/27/84).

In the spring of 1982 Brown invited area middle schools to write proposals explaining why they should be named the OAG project school. Several faculty members convinced Tommy Thompson to let them apply, and, following formal application and a series of interviews, Boynton was selected. (During their interview, the three teachers "begged to be chosen"; FN, 3/27/84). While the intentions of the faculty were clearly positive--turning Boynton into an effective school would help the students--certain teachers also saw the project as a way to rid the school of Mr. Thompson, whom they viewed as hopelessly incompetent (FN, 10/27/83). He, on the other hand, may have seen the project as his job's salvation; even if outsiders were

required to cure Boynton's ills, he, as principal, would inevitably reap the benefits (FN, 12/5/83).

3. Conceptual and Methodological Overview

Despite the fact that numerous definitions coexist in the literature, to discuss curriculum change requires that I define exactly what I mean by "curriculum." Having been schooled a neo-Tylerian, I subscribe to the following definition of curriculum: what teachers intend students to learn in their classes as a result of instruction. To me curriculum is distinct conceptually from instruction (although in practice, just as one cannot eat without eating something, the two eventually occur together). To study the process of curriculum change, then, necessitates close observation of and involvement with classroom teachers.

However, because the formal curriculum development process typically occurs outside the classroom and often without the involvement of inservice teachers, studying curriculum change also requires an examination of all the events that produce "the curriculum" for a school or system, however the developers define the term. Jeanne Jackson, Boynton's "curriculum" coordinator, took as her charge the improvement of teachers' performance in the classroom, whether this meant working on what I might consider curricular matters (e.g., getting different materials to teach certain objectives) or instructional concerns (e.g., explaining methods for teaching reading comprehension). Her focus for the year was twofold: observing the "written

curriculum in operation" and "providing teaching strategies to make it better" (FN, 11/3/83).

For the purpose of this paper, then, the process of curriculum change is operationally defined as any activities of the Boynton or OAG staff (primarily Jeanne Jackson, Cynthia McDuff, and Tommy Thompson) that were intended to result in an observable change in the classroom. While this definition goes far beyond my own, it enables me to include in the discussion many of the year's events that my personal definition would exclude.[4]

It is not my intention to provide here a fullblown review of the literature relating to curriculum change. To do so would require attention to at least six sets of variables and all the possible combinations that result (i.e., Who is making the change? What is the focus of the change, a process or a product? Why is the change being made? Where and when is the change to take place, both in the broadest and most specific sense? and How is the change process conceived and organized?). This review is an ongoing project that accompanies my involvement at Boynton and may well require the remaining three years of the project. Suffice it to say that, to my knowledge, only recently--and this session is an example of current work--have curriculum people begun looking at the workings-out of the curriculum use and change process in the classroom, the "practical knowledge" of the classroom teacher (see, e.g., Janesick, 1978; Elbaz, 1983; Oberg &

Moncion, 1983).

One group of earlier studies, however, provides an appropriate context for the current discussion. Five studies document the process of change in a curriculum project (Shipman, 1974; Walker, 1975; Hamilton, 1975; Olson, 1981; Butt, 1983). All but Walker's study (which took place at Stanford University) point to the power of the classroom teacher to subvert curriculum change, whether or not intentionally. As Shipman (1974, pp. 47,71) notes:

> The teachers were involved in their own problems and defined the project out of their own experience in their own classrooms. As a consequence the basic principles behind the project were usually misunderstood and often unconsidered. . . It was the local horizons and narrow terms of reference of the teachers that formed the main barrier to genuine implementation.

While teachers are certainly not to blame for their necessarily limited focus, their ultimate power to block change behind the classroom door--and even to prevent its ever getting in--cannot be overlooked. The experiences at Boynton this year must be viewed in this light.

Before describing the research setting, let me make a brief methodological comment. Glaser and Strauss (1967) point to the value of exploratory, qualitative studies for generating "grounded theory," and the research cited above makes it clear that the curriculum change process cannot be fully understood using only quantitative research methods. The Boynton study, therefore, is using naturalistic methods in combination with an occasional questionnaire to focus on the process through which the curriculum at this urban

middle school gets changed by teachers in classrooms. To date, this change has not happened, and what I have documented instead is the failure of the change process, in itself an important (though frustrating) undertaking.

Naturalistic studies are known to generate reams of data, and this study is no exception. In addition to attending two organizational meetings in May, 1982, I have been on site at Boynton at least one day a week since August, 1982, for a total of 68 days over two full school years. The activities of the OAG's project aimed at improving the curriculum have been documented in a number of different forms, including the following: field notes (from conversations and observations in the faculty lounge, classrooms, the office, various committee and "team" meetings, faculty meetings, etc.); school documents (formal minutes of meetings, written curricula, memos, central office materials, etc.); formal interview notes; ongoing analyses written periodically in an attempt to make sense of what is happening in the project; and, as mentioned above, the results of several questionnaires, to date, two of mine and three of the project staff. I also have access to the system's demographic and test data for Boynton. Together with my ongoing involvement in the school, these documents enable me to follow up (or "triangulate") on various ideas about the change process as they develop.

A comment about entree is required here, because I am a white, middle-class female studying a school that is 95%

black and located near a large housing project. Last spring when I asked the project's School Committee, the representative policy making group, for permission to conduct a formal research study at Boynton, they unanimously approved. By that time mine was a familiar face around school. As the principal put it, "You're already family. We feel we can share our frustration and our joys with you" (FN, 4/6/83). At the same meeting, an astute teacher pointed out that

> Next year could be very hard for us. It will be good to have someone to record what we're doing, right and wrong, and to blow off steam to . . . That's what this study will do, right? (FN, 4/6/83).

Teachers frequently stop me in the halls, the faculty lounge, and even the bathroom to fill me in on the latest details; their gripes become my data.

I must also point out, and only half facetiously, that for most of the two years that I've been at Boynton, I have been pregnant. (My son was born in November, 1982; the new baby is due April 25.) In a school where all but eight teachers are women over 30 and in a culture that sees babies as a positive affirmation of life, this condition may have been an important asset. (Please note that I do not, however, advocate or even encourage pregnancy as a necessary technique for gaining entree!)

4. Curriculum Change Activities at Boynton, August, 1983-February, 1984

Narrative. (The appendix contains the names and roles of those involved in this year's change activities.) As was noted above, curriculum planning during the first year of the Boynton School Improvement Project produced little for implementation in 1983-1984 (King, 1983a). Allocated half an hour at the opening faculty meeting to discuss the "new" curriculum, I needed only five minutes to say that the proposal to the board recommended adding several new courses. Despite a year of Curriculum Subcommittee meetings, teachers began year 2 of the project with no specific changes to effect in their classrooms, but merely the charge that the achievement test scores of Boynton's students increase by the spring. At planning meetings over the summer, OAG staff had decided to focus on improving reading and math instruction since these two skill areas are emphasized on standardized tests. This recommendation was announced at the first faculty meeting.

The lack of detail about the year's changes concerned no one, however, partly because of the optimism of a new year and at least partly because in August the School Board had appointed Jeanne Jackson as the fulltime "curriculum coordinator" for Boynton. Jackson was to be a curricular and instructional change agent who would pick up where the Subcommittee left off in the spring and somehow cause change.[5] At last someone was in charge of and responsible

for this most vital process.

In 1981-1982 when she was serving as a coordinator for a costly and doomed systemwide curriculum improvement program, I had come to know Jackson and had been impressed by her enthusiasm. In the year following her program's demise, she had taught high school English for a time, then been named to the staff of a newly-formed instructional improvement unit for the system. In a systemwide administrative reorganization during the summer of 1983, the unit was dissolved, and Jackson assigned to a supervisory position in the middle school superintendent's office. Somehow (neither she nor her two immediate superiors report knowing how) she was named fulltime to Boynton Middle School to act as the school system's change agent in the OAG-funded project.

For several reasons the placement was a difficult one for Jackson. To be put in a single school was to lose the status and freedom of a central office position, while at the same time increasing the visible accountability of her job as change agent. She repeatedly commented that while the project was in its second year, she was in her planning year (FN, 11/18/83) and little immediate change could be expected. The fact that she first heard her job description when it was presented at a School Committee meeting (to which she was invited, through an oversight, at the last minute) and that a memo was distributed to all Boynton faculty and staff declaring that she was allowed to be out

of the building only four hours a week did little to ease her transition.

In addition, there was friction between Jackson and the OAG staff over expectations, project activities, and personal style. While at one point an OAG staff member stated that it was an "act of divine intervention that Jeanne Jackson was assigned here" (FN, 10/7/83), by late October the same person wondered whether she and Jackson would ever be able to work together successfully (FN, 10/27/83).

Nonetheless, Jackson, who prides herself on being highly professional, worked throughout the schoolyear to evolve a plan for effecting classroom improvement. Her strategy was to spend the first two months of school getting to know Boynton and its faculty, "working in areas that won't disrupt teachers," finding out their curriculum needs while they simultaneously got to know her. With the school routine settled at the end of the first quarter, she would draw up a plan to work directly with teachers. Teachers were not involved at any time in the planning process.

And so during September and October Jackson worked actively to get to know Boynton: she created a slogan for the project--"Boynton School is Movin' On"--and a curriculum newsletter (only Volume I, Number 1 ever appeared); she conducted two written surveys of the faculty, the first to determine which textbooks and state and system curriculum guides were being used in the building, the second to find

out from teachers what specific help she could offer them; she helped the school librarian plan special activities (none of which ever took place); she arranged for two teachers to visit other schools; and she got instructional materials for several teachers. Jackson also conducted a session on clinical supervision for Cynthia McDuff and Boynton's administrators.

Jackson's most time-consuming initial work involved the analysis of the school's 1983 state minimum competency and system achievement test results, at the insistence of a superintendent who was helping Mr. Thompson (the principal) conduct administrative team meetings. She presented these schoolwide results to math and language arts (reading and English) teachers at special faculty meetings in October, pointing to two areas of specific weakness: reading comprehension and mathematical problem solving. Teachers still had no easy access to individual student's test results, and the effect on instruction was minimal at best. The analysis did, however, provide Jackson a focus for the year's long-range curriculum improvement activities.

In November, familiar with the faculty's needs, Jackson laid out an agenda for instructional change at Boynton for the rest of the first semester, a set of specific tasks to be completed by mid-January, 1984. These eventually became the goals for the entire year. As she put it, "We have to determine our mastery level for this year" so "[we can] bound the problem" (FN, 11/3/83). In 1983-1984 the overall

goal of the project, to "improve the achievement of Boynton Middle School students," would be addressed with seven activities:

1. To determine what a "realistic rise in [test] scores would mean" (i.e., what improvement could be realistically expected within one year at Boynton);

2. "To identify the areas of greatest [student] deficiency" by having teachers examine and plot individual students' test scores;

3. "To provide [language arts] teachers with information on 'How Reading Develops' (workshop)";

4. To "design strategies for teaching reading and begin to implement [them] in the classroom" by developing packets of appropriate activities and, through observation, monitoring their use;

5. To provide math teachers with strategies for teaching problem solving and help them implement these in their classes;

6. "To encourage (language arts and math) teachers to use grouping" by holding a session with a "local middle school teacher who has done grouping successfully," then helping and observing Boynton faculty as they "implement the process <u>one class period at a time</u>" (emphasis in original); and

7. To provide test-taking strategies for both teachers and students in preparation for the state assessment and system achievement tests in the spring (planning documents, 11/83).

The relationship between the ultimate goal of higher test scores and these activities seems limited at best. It is important to note that the planning at no point involved any teachers and that only Activity 7 was to include the entire Boynton faculty. What follows is a progress report on each of the activities.

1. <u>To determine what a "realistic rise in [test] scores would mean</u>." The person who was most interested in determining how much of a rise in test scores could be expected realistically was a superintendent who stopped

participating in the Boynton project around December, 1983. If completed, the results of this activity were never presented to the faculty.

2. "To identify the areas of greatest [student] deficiency" by having teachers examine and plot individual students' test scores. It has already been noted that in October Jackson analyzed Boynton's test results and reported two areas of general weakness. To this day (and not atypically), however, the majority of the individual test reports for last year's system achievement test remain unfiled and unused in the guidance counsellor's office. To get them filed or distributed is beyond the capabilities of even the guidance counsellor, who seems to be one of the hardest working individuals at Boynton. A print-out of these scores and of the state assessment results for last year's seventh graders, listed alphabetically by grade, is available somewhere in the main office, but to my knowledge no teacher has used either of these to assess his or her students' needs. In that sense, the specific activity planned in November never came about.

However, early in 1984, Jackson and McDuff changed their objective and decided it would make more sense to develop a plan for diagnostic testing to be implemented on Day 1 of next year (FN, 1/17/84). (It is truly a comment on the change process that even as the second semester was just beginning, they sensed it was already too late to help individualize instruction this year!) Jackson and McDuff chose instead to locate appropriate instruments for both reading and math, pilot-test them to get current results, then help teachers write individual "prescriptions" for at least some of their students this spring. A February workshop was planned for this purpose.

Because Jackson became increasingly unavailable at Boynton around this time (as will be explained below), McDuff located two tests (the Stanford Diagnostic and the Degrees of Reading Power), administered them to at least one class for each language arts and math teacher (a total of 12 classes), scored them by hand, then returned to the classes with their results and an explanation of what they meant. The scores were predictably well below grade-level, which upset McDuff greatly, but the students not at all (FN, 2/21/84).

But due to circumstances beyond Jackson and McDuff's control, individual prescriptions have yet to be made for any students. Although the workshop planned for February was scheduled and rescheduled three times, it was never held, once because of the systemwide testing workshop for seventh grade language arts and math teachers and twice because the meeting time was usurped by Mr. Thompson to arrange logistics and otherwise prepare for the spring's

standardized testing. A comment made by MacDuff in January holds equally true today: "Instruction here comes from the need to manage a class, not from the needs of students FN, 1/17/84).

3. "To provide [language arts] teachers with information on 'How Reading Develops' (workshop)". By early December, Jackson had scheduled a January 4th workshop for all language arts teachers. Rather than having an outsider come for three hours, she arranged for one of Boynton's administrators, a longtime Title I reading teacher, to make the presentation. This administrator "jumped at the chance" to do it (FN, 12/5/83), and the notion of an in-house reading consultant made good sense. But the workshop, held January 11, disappointed both Jackson and McDuff. Teachers straggled in 15 to 20 minutes late, and, despite considerable lead-time, the presenter was clearly not well prepared, using no audio-visual equipment (not even a blackboard) and emphasizing that "I am not the expert; we all have knowledge and information we can share" (FN, 1/11/84).

The good that did happen, however, was an open dialogue among language arts teachers, a discussion of problems with textbooks, grouping procedures, and "scope and sequence." Both Jeanne Jackson and Louise Skelton, her immediate superior, encouraged this exchange because, as Skelton noted immediately afterwards, the Boynton faculty rarely talked about instructional concerns and this would be a first step in their being motivated to change. Or, as Jackson later put it, "We talk about instructional change, but these people aren't even at the awareness level" (FN, 1/17/84). The evaluation results suggested that these teachers did enjoy the professional interaction and wanted more opportunities for it (Evaluation, 1/11/84).

However, the in-house reading consultant has done no further "consulting," and, except for meetings to discuss test preparation for the upcoming standardized testing, the language arts teachers have not met again to discuss instructional concerns.

4. To "design strategies for teaching reading and begin to implement [them] in the classroom" by developing packets of appropriate activities and, through observation, monitoring their use. January's reading workshop included discussions of strategies for teaching reading (e.g., various worksheets for teaching different reading skills), but except for the handouts at that session, no general packets of materials have been distributed for instructional use. Jeanne Jackson has occasionally helped individual teachers with materials and ideas for specific lessons, but not on a regular basis. Before Christmas she had observed each language arts teacher at least once, but the consistent

observation of instruction--by her, McDuff, or any of the school administrators--has not occurred.

5. To provide math teachers with strategies for teaching problem solving and help them implement these in their classes. The workshop for math teachers was held on the same day as that for the language arts teachers (1/11/84). The speaker was a system supervisor, and, in contrast to the in-house reading consultant, he came as an expert, giving what he called "curriculum guidelines" for teaching problem solving along with a theoretical and research-based rationale for doing so. The math teachers, however, were both unconvinced and hostile. Each in turn criticized the speaker, explaining that there was simply no way Boynton's students could be asked to solve problems, even for ten minutes a day, because they were unable to do basic arithmetic. Beyond presenting a uniform front to the outside speaker, little "professional sharing" took place, and, although he promised to do so, the speaker has not returned to Boynton for further inservice work.

6. "To encourage [language arts and math] teachers to use grouping" by holding a session with a "local middle school teacher who has done grouping successfully," then helping and observing Boynton faculty as they "implement the process one classroom at a time." In early January Jeanne Jackson cancelled the scheduled workshop on grouping because the teachers were "not ready for it." The session is not scheduled to take place until sometime next fall.

7. To provide test-taking strategies for both teachers and students in preparation for the state assessment and system achievement tests in the spring. In order to discuss Jackson's involvement in presenting test-taking skills to Boynton's faculty, a brief digression is necessary. Once the dust from the central office reorganization in the summer had settled, Jackson spent increasingly little time at Boynton, working instead as an assistant to Louise Skelton, the person responsible for language arts instruction in the middle schools. Unlike anyone at Boynton, Skelton was Jackson's line superior, and, being a team player, Jackson responded accordingly.

Whereas in September and October she named Boynton as her major priority (FN, 11/1/83), by January Jackson publically described Boynton as the middle school she was working with as a "model for the rest of the system" (FN, 1/6/84). Her involvement in developing activities for all middle school personnel required almost all of her working hours, and faculty rarely if ever saw her in the halls at Boynton. When her office at Boynton became the home for 15 IBM personal computers in March (she was assigned to another room with numerous chairs, but no desk or table), she no longer even had a place to hang her coat. But it didn't

matter; the system had given Boynton's fulltime "curriculum coordinator" another job.

Jackson's new perspective became obvious to Cynthia McDuff in January. The plans for diagnostic testing (described in 2 above) were made at a meeting on January 17. A week later a second meeting was held, but this time with Louise Skelton present. Although the second "sharing session" for language arts and math teachers remained scheduled for February 14, the plans made the week before--plans that McDuff thought were final--were first discussed, then reduced in light of Skelton's recommendations. During the meeting it became clear that for the next month Skelton needed Jackson to help plan and conduct workshops on test-taking skills for <u>all</u> seventh grade language arts and math teachers in the system. (These were held February 7-9). Boynton was no longer her central concern, and after this her presence in the building became increasingly rare.

With McDuff's aid, Jackson, did, however, see to it that test-taking strategies were given to Boynton's teachers and students. Teachers had access to booklets, published by the test manufacturer, that contained exercises on how to do well on the previous version of the test; these were used extensively in the three weeks before the test administration. And, in addition to the systemwide workshops language arts and math teachers attended in February, Jackson met with the entire faculty on March 27 to discuss the new form of the achievement test (she had borrowed one of the few copies from the test library so teachers could see the actual items), to suggest ways to prepare students to take it, and to demonstrate how the test objectives could be used instructionally during the next schoolyear. She also volunteered to hold teachers' classes so they could drive to the central office and examine the test more carefully.

It is perhaps surprising to note 30 pages into this paper that despite the failure of the planned change activities to affect <u>teachers</u> dramatically, in one sense there was major curricular change at Boynton this year, and change in the formal sense of intended learning outcomes. However, what created curricular change this year was not teachers' behaviors, but rather a new "and educationally improved" schedule. It is likely that the year began with a

six-period schedule simply because Mr. Thompson did the schedule by hand and, having used six-period days for years, knew how to put such a schedule together.

But with pressure from the OAG staff and with the faculty's approval (21 yes/5 no), three weeks into the schoolyear Tommy Thompson implemented a seven-period day so that all students would have a full year of science, seventh graders a half year each of art and home economics, and eighth graders a half year each of Spanish and typing. This could be accomplished using current faculty who held appropriate certification. In addition, the new schedule allowed for one class each of industrial arts (taught by Mr. Thompson), vocal music, and band (taught by itinerant teachers from a nearby high school).

In Cynthia McDuff's view, "none of the changes were for educational goals." The reason for adding these courses was not necessarily "to help kids, but to make us more like [a nearby junior high school], to make us more attractive." (Some teachers had advocated this at the first OAG/faculty meeting in May, 1982). If the change was significant, it was made for the wrong reasons; the curriculum had been altered as a public relations move, although no one then publicized the additions. As the principal of the system's largest middle school noted in February,

> What I hear [is that] Boynton isn't producing now any better than they were five years ago. . . I don't hear that electives are offered, that the school is getting better (FN, 2/14/84).

The results of a questionnaire given to teachers in

February were relatively evenly divided among those who thought the curriculum had changed (43%), those who thought it hadn't (29%), and those who didn't know (29%) (questionnaire results, 2/84). As one teacher wrote, "There have been additions, but as far as actual change is concerned, that's debatable." Or another, "For the curriculum to change I think it is necessary to see something constructive or tangible resulting from any addition"; he or she clearly did not see this tangible result.

Ironically--and such are the quirks of curriculum change--Boynton was one year ahead of mandated state changes in the middle school curriculum. McDuff chuckled as she noted, "We added by sheer happenstance foreign language and science, and now the state has mandated this" (FN, 3/21/84). However, as the curriculum change activities to date have had (in retrospect, predictably) little if any effect on the behaviors and attitudes of the teachers, it seems highly unlikely that they will have any effect this year on the OAG project's ultimate goal of raising achievement test scores.

How was this allowed to happen?

Discussion. The presence of Jeanne Jackson as the system-sponsored curriculum coordinator for Boynton was a critical element. When she was put in charge of the process in August, Boynton faculty and OAG staff alike breathed a sigh of relief. Unlike the project's planning year (1982-1983) when the teachers were forced to take on the

curriculum change planning themselves, during the second year someone with experience in the field was being paid to worry fulltime about creating appropriate change at Boynton. Since everyone had other things to do, the responsibility was relinquished happily.

Because it was her first year at Boynton, Jeanne Jackson decided to move slowly, at what she considered a deliberate pace. She spent two months analyzing and orienting herself to the school, then elected to conduct activities, not one of which ultimately committed her to working one-on-one with a teacher in his or her classroom. Holding workshops and discussions on strategies for teaching certain skills was a logical first step, but, it must be noted, an easy and non-threatening one for a curriculum planner who has had considerable experience in conducting inservice sessions, but little experience in direct classroom supervision and seemingly little desire to do any.

As the narrative makes clear, Jackson's position at Boynton was not of her choosing, and, although she pitched in because it was her professional responsibility to do so, she gladly returned to her systemwide commitment as the year wore on. Boynton was no longer her sole focus, but became instead a test-case, one among many. And once Jackson operationally renounced her role as Boynton's curriculum coordinator, there was no one to take her place. Tommy Thompson was not an instructional leader in the school; the Curriculum Subcommittee had never been reactivated; and

Cynthia McDuff, who by December had decided that instructional change should be a primary activity of her own, was reluctant to step on what she considered Jackson's turf (FN, 1/17/84). She continued to work in conjunction with Jackson on the pre-determined curriculum change activities, none of which included regular involvement in the classroom.

Unfortunately, as they had evolved, the year's activities failed to include two essential elements: the active participation of teachers and the ongoing clinical supervision with individual teachers to implement desired changes in their classrooms. Even though virtually all teachers were open to observation and criticism, neither Jackson nor McDuff took advantage of their willingness to be supervised--a fact that by March made McDuff feel guilty (FN, 3/21/84).

The selected activities, then, were unable to get beyond the classroom door unless <u>teachers</u> chose to make appropriate changes on their own. But for three reasons the likelihood of this occurring was small: (1) the various meetings and workshops provided few explicit how-to's for changing instruction; (2) some teachers (especially in math) found the recommended changes either undesirable or impossible; and (3) in the absence of considerable administrative and peer support, little motivation existed for an experienced faculty like that at Boynton to make such instructional changes. They continued to teach as they always had,

emphasizing large group instruction and recitation, classroom control, and testing for the lowest levels of knowledge (FN, 1/6/84). At Boynton, this is the norm and considered "good" teaching. Without ongoing observation and counselling with individual teachers, then, the likelihood of workshops and random observations creating classroom change remained minimal.

You may well wonder how teachers have greeted their non-involvement in planning the curriculum change activities this year. There has been almost no comment on curricular issues, largely because of more immediate problems, for example, with scheduling and discipline, but also because of the Boynton school attitude--better to put off 'til tomorrow what you could do today, especially if no one is watching. As one teacher put it, whereas in the beginning of the year people were nervous about potential changes, "Teachers are real comfortable now because nothing's happening" (FN, 2/3/84). Weeks later the same person noted, "There've been so many changes through [here] that until they happen, no one will believe it" (FN, 2/21/84). And at a recent School Committee meeting, an extremely vocal teacher declared that "change isn't coming fast enough, and teachers have lost interest" (FN, 4/3/84).

However, another reason for the lack of curricular change at Boynton this year has nothing to do with the activities described in the narrative. Even though outsiders with a knowledge of the teacher effectiveness

literature might wince at what they saw, classroom instruction at Boynton continued this year in an orderly manner. As noted earlier, Boynton looks like any other school, and most students attend their classes and are taught. Because of this, other problems and activities needing immediate attention were consistently able to take priority over classroom curriculum change. These events were of three types:

1. Boynton priorities. Throughout the year the faculty reacted, sometimes almost violently, to problems unique to Boynton. Examples are obvious: the continuing discussion of discipline at the school, a topic either put on the agenda or brought up independently at every faculty meeting; problems with scheduling, first when a seventh period was added in September and then when a new schedule replaced the old in January; and the faculty's reaction to the OAG project and their concern that too little was happening.

2. System priorities. Boynton Middle School is part of a large city system that is attempting to improve itself from the central office level. Several times during the year, Boynton's faculty and administration responded to central office mandates. The following examples are typical: in December Boynton experienced a "school site visitation," a five day, fact-finding visit from a team of system staff and administrators followed by a faculty meeting and written evaluation (Boynton got a 3 out of 10 in McDuff's opinion; FN, 1/6/84); seventh grade math and language arts teachers attended a mandated workshop on test-taking skills in February; and teachers attended two recommended faculty meetings to discuss the new form of the system's standardized test in March.

3. The press of the schoolyear. Not only did Boynton's faculty respond to school and system priorities, but they were unavoidably swept along by the events common to every year, events that inevitably require an extensive commitment of time and periodically reduce teachers' involvement in the OAG's project. The examples are not unusual: Thanksgiving, Christmas, and mid-winter vacations; the annual dances (Victory Dance, Valentine Hop and the

election of Miss Boynton, Graduation Cotillion); the Thanksgiving and Christmas plays; the distribution of New Testaments by the Gideons; the annual day-long bowling trip; career day; and the visit of potential seventh graders in April.

Combining these priorities with the seven curriculum change activities discussed above provides additional reason for the lack of classroom change at Boynton this year.

5. Factors Affecting the Curriculum Change Process

The challenge of qualitative research lies in wresting conclusions from the myriad details recorded in field notes, survey results, interviews, and the various other materials that become data. Such ideas, grounded in and emerging from these data, are subject to revision as new data supplement the old, and it is in this light that I present three factors that have affected the curriculum change process at Boynton Middle School this year. While these factors are certainly not new to the school change literature (see, e.g., Louis & Rosenblum, 1981), they once again emerge in the Boynton data. The factors are the following: (1) the absence of leadership in the curriculum change process and the related failure to actively involve classroom teachers in it; (2) the lack of communication between teachers and change agents as to exactly what classroom change was expected and the failure to help teachers effect such change; and (3), in the absence of instructional crises in classrooms, the overpowering ability of the ongoing functioning of a school to take precedence over curriculum change activities.

The first factor, the absence of leadership in the curriculum change process, characterizes other aspects of the Boynton project as well. As an outside evaluator recently noted, "[The problem with this project is that]

everyone expects someone else to do the job" (FN, 3/13/84). When Jeanne Jackson came to Boynton in August, 1983, curriculum change became her problem. The teachers who had worked diligently on the Curriculum Subcommittee the year before went on to other interests, assuming that Jackson was now in charge of the curriculum and would involve them as necessary.

However, the teachers' involvement this year never became active or meaningful. Because of her ties at the system level, Jackson's commitment to the school decreased noticeably as the first semester wore on, and it all but ended by the middle of the second semester. Although Jackson had been named an insider, she remained an outsider, and, with the exception of Cynthia McDuff's continuing participation, no one was available to replace her. Except on paper, the curriculum change process at Boynton lost its leader by mid-March, and it is now uncertain whether Jackson will again be assigned to Boynton in the fall. The curriculum change activities have continued as planned, but because of their distance from actual classroom instruction, it is unlikely that they will end in observable changes in Boynton's classrooms.[6]

The second factor, poor communication, is clearly tied to the lack of clarity in the curricular changes considered essential to the project. The source of the problem can be traced to the OAG's purposefully vague mandate to the school. From the beginning, beyond stipulating that Boynton

would be a "better" school when its test scores went up, the OAG has not imposed any solutions, but has sought instead to stimulate the change process. It is impossible to communicate in specific terms undefined or general ends (e.g., be a better reading teacher; teach problem solving skills). While she was willing to be more directive than the OAG, Jeanne Jackson didn't want to push for more than she thought was attainable in her first year with the project, perhaps fearing that her reputation would be at stake. Her eventual shift away from the school removed her from responsibility for classroom change, and, as a result, teachers have had little help in altering their in-class curricula.

Even had Jackson remained on-site, the seven activities planned in the fall--and again I must emphasize, without the participation of a single teacher--failed to move into classrooms to work directly with the faculty. This is not to say that the chosen activities were inappropriate, but merely that they placed the burden of change on the faculty without providing support or reinforcement for such change. In the absence of someone to work with them, to push them to try new content and instructional strategies, Boynton's teachers, the majority of whom have years of experience, continued to teach as they always have.

Unfortunately, now that the Boynton School Improvement Project is two years old, it is clear that the teachers, most of whom truly care about their students and want to do

a better job, will not change without some form of explicit direction and ongoing clinical supervision in their classrooms. Discussing curricular change in faculty workshops may be necessary, but it is not sufficient. Specific suggestions, developed with the active participation of faculty, must be taken into Boynton's classrooms and their implementation carefully monitored. In the absence of this process, classroom curriculum change remains an unlikely prospect; this year, after all, the changes in the curriculum stemmed from a new schedule, not from any changes in teacher behaviors. While it may be discouraging that it has taken two years to realize this, such lessons once learned are well learned. They may be an essential part of the bootstrap process.

The third factor affecting the curriculum change process at Boynton demonstrates the relative unimportance of instruction in the ongoing functioning of an ineffective school. The old adage, "If it's not broken, don't fix it," comes to mind. As long as classes are relatively quiet and under control, as long as parents don't complain, and as long as instructional leadership is absent, numerous other concerns are able to take precedence over curriculum change activities. The fact that several objective indicators suggest that something is seriously wrong at the school can be ignored as faculty and administration alike respond to Boynton's more immediate and visible problems (e.g., attendance, discipline), to the mandates of the system's

central office, and to the ongoing cycle of the school year that moves the calendar forward swiftly. If curriculum change is to occur, something or someone must break the cycle and make such change a priority in the faculty's minds. This has not yet occurred at Boynton.

Where, then, does this leave the curriculum change process at Boynton Middle School? The fact that the schoolyear has entered its fourth quarter and is rushing to its conclusion means that for this year the issue is dead. And, as noted earlier, it is unlikely that Jeanne Jackson will be renamed Boynton's curriculum coordinator next year. Her likely functional successor is Cynthia McDuff, and my sense is that the project has learned from its errors. In March, an outside evaluator told the faculty, "Change is possible only if you change what you do in the classroom. . . It all boils down to teachers in the classroom changing what you're doing" (FN, 3/13/84). Also, in a recent discussion McDuff lamented,

> I allowed all my other job activities to take precedence, but it [working directly with teachers in their classes] would have been the most useful thing I could have done, even if I'd only taken five teachers (FN, 3/21/84).

In closing, I want to refer back to the Shipman quotation cited in Section 3. In it, he names teachers' "local horizons and narrow terms of reference" as impediments to the curriculum implementation process. While this paper has not discussed in detail the responses of Boynton's principal and teachers to the activities of Jeanne

Jackson, their continued non-involvement suggests the low priority of curriculum change at the school.[7] But the idea contained in Shipman's quotation applies equally well to Jackson and McDuff, the curriculum change agents at Boynton. In their narrow frame of reference, workshops and presentations were a logical and efficient way to inform teachers of needed changes; regretably, these were also an inefficient way to get teachers to actually change their curricula and instruction.

Next year the curriculum change process at Boynton should certainly focus on and involve classroom teachers. The interaction between McDuff's work with the Boynton faculty and the numerous outside forces affecting the curriculum will be of interest. The following elements will deserve particular attention:

- -The role (if any) of Jeanne Jackson, operating from the central office;
- -The placement of 20 to 30 microcomputers at Boynton over the summer plus at least minimal training for half the faculty in how to use them for computer-assisted instruction;
- -An OAG-sponsored summer fair for the incoming seventh and eighth graders, emphasizing reading instruction;
- -A new program of centralized, quarterly, objectives-based testing;
- -A new systemwide, skills-based K-12 curriculum being implemented for the first time; and
- -As a result of new system stands, the use of a uniform textbook for each subject at each grade level, regardless of students' reading levels.

Colleagues and friends who have read the narrative presented here often ask me how I can stand to work on a

project that seems so discouraging. Despite the little progress that has been made in my two years' involvement, I remain hopeful that this school will turn itself around and move toward effectiveness. Educational change is a slow process, but it does occur. A teacher at Boynton made this point eloquently:

> Ten years ago they had an opera company come to this school; yesterday they had an opera company come to this school. Ten years ago, students threw anything they could find--seat bottoms, anything--and the principal said, "Just leave. Get out of here." School was cancelled.
>
> Yesterday they [the student audience] groaned at first. . . but at the end, there was applause. That may not sound like a whole lot for ten years, but it is a change (FN, 2/21/84).

And it is changes like these that keep me going.

6. Endnotes

1. Unlike most secondary schools in the system, Boynton's attendance is taken first thing in the morning, rather than after the first period class. Several people think that Boynton's a.d.a. would be boosted by making this administrative change, but it has not happened to date.

2. Seventy-five people attended the fall (1983) parents' open house, a welcome change from the normal attendance rate. However, this has not led to increased parental involvement during the 1983-1984 schoolyear.

3. In addition, itinerant band and vocal music teachers teach one class a day, but beyond this involvement they in no sense have become part of the Boynton faculty.

4. I noted in an earlier paper (King, 1983a) that Boynton's faculty and administration subscribe to at least three definitions of curriculum:

   a. "All of the activities that are included in the school's program of study," including all extracurricular activities and events (questionnaire results, 8/83);

   b. The "subject matter to be presented," i.e., the school's course of studies and topic outlines for each subject (questionnaire results, 8/83); and

   c. A written document that presents the school's course of studies, including a "philosophy," goals, and objectives and perhaps a description of extra-curricular activities.

The effect of these different conceptions of the curriculum make no difference in the everyday functioning of the school, a point we curriculum researchers would do well to remember.

5. Given Jeanne Jackson's presence, she, Cynthia McDuff, and I debated at several points during the year whether or not to reactivate the Curriculum Subcommittee. Suffice it to say the group never met during 1983-1984, despite the continuing interest of at least two teachers. Perhaps the most telling statement about that Subcommittee's role is the following section from the School Committee minutes (10/18/83):

> Do we need to talk any about the Curriculum Subcommittee? None of the members from that subcommittee are here, but various persons have expressed an interest.
>
> No discussion was held on this matter. (Emphasis added).

6. One component of the test-taking skills activities this year included the OAG-funded purchase of booklets designed by the publisher of the standardized achievement test to help prepare students to take the exam. Since mid-March, these have been used extensively in English, reading, and math classes, replacing regular instruction. While this is certainly curricular change, some might question whether or not it is a change for the better.

7. This will be the topic of a later paper.

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